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ABSTRACT

The issues and challenges facing those who administer the general instruction programs in colleges and universities represent a pattern of frequent change. The highly formal programs of uniforms and conformance of past years and the individualized, adventure type programs that are popular today represent some of the changes in general instruction programs. Administrators have faced the challenges and changes mandated by the drastic reduction in the number of departments requiring activity courses. The anticipated decline in enrollments that was supposed to occur when programs became totally elective was only temporary. Because of the elective nature of the programs they are probably much improved. Problems that are still present and that require the attention of administrators include funding the service program, obtaining adequate facilities and equipment, protecting our territory, anticipating the ever changing needs and interest of students, and providing programs that offer opportunities to a changing population in our colleges and universities. (Author)

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ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN ADMINISTERING THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION PROGRAM IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The issues and challenges facing those who administer the general instruction programs in colleges and universities represent a pattern of frequent change. The highly formal programs of uniforms and conformance of past years and the individualized, adventure type programs that are popular today represent some of the changes in general instruction programs. Administrators have faced the challenges and changes mandated by the drastic reduction in the number of departments requiring activity courses. The anticipated decline in enrollments that was supposed to occur when programs became totally elective, was only temporary. Because of the elective nature of the programs they are probably much improved. Problems that are still present and that require the attention of administrators include funding the service program, obtaining adequate facilities and equipment, protecting our territory, anticipating the ever changing needs and interests of students, and providing programs that offer opportunities to a changing population in our colleges and universities.

Issues and Challenges in Administering
the General Instruction Program
in Colleges and Universities

In order to intelligently discuss the issues and challenges facing today's general instruction program, a review of past history seems appropriate. A perusal of the available literature highlights some of the subtle, as well as the obvious and dramatic changes, that have taken place. Perhaps the more obvious change has been in the terms used to describe the general instruction program.

A review of past titles that have been used for this program indicate several changes. Some thirty years ago the title used was, the required program. This title was descriptive of the way the program was viewed by students, physical education faculties, and administrators. It was in this era that most college and university students were required to take courses in a general program. In 1961 the term used to describe the program was, service program. Again, the title is indicative of the manner in which these one hour courses were viewed by college and university communities. In more recent years these courses have been referred to as the activity program, the general instructional program, the non-major program, and the basic program. Today all these terms are used interchangeably to describe what many believe to be the lifeblood,

or bread and butter of physical education departments.

A number of studies, or surveys have been conducted since 1954 that describe the status of physical education activity programs. The first of these, now out of print, was the work of Hunsicker in 1954.[1] Since that first study of modern times, Oxendine published the results of surveys in 1961,[2] 1969,[3] 1972[4] and in 1978.[5] The most recent study was completed by Trimble and Hensley in 1982.[6] These studies reveal some interesting changes and trends. The percentage of college and university physical education departments offering activity courses has remained essentially unchanged over the years. However, the number of institutions requiring physical education has steadily declined until the most recent report. The scope, or content, of the service program has changed significantly. Team sports which once dominated service programs have essentially been replaced by individual sports. The percentage of institutions granting academic credit and including grades received in service class in the grade point average, has increased. Probably the most dramatic change has occurred in the percentage of programs offering coeducational classes. Criteria for the assignment of grades, letter grades versus pass/fail options, and proficiency testing have undergone changes over the years.

Many of these changes are reflections of societal changes, curricular revisions, student unrest and various other factors that influence higher education. Some changes, such as the increased number of institutions offering coeducational classes, are the results of federal mandates.

Perhaps the change that produced the greatest concern in the profession was the move from a required program to an elective one by a majority of departments. Predictions that enrollments in service programs would plummet were supported for the first few years after this change. More recently however, the decrease in enrollments seems to have stabilized and, in fact, enrollments in some departments have increased. Some of the reasons advanced for the change to elective physical education include: (1) lack of resources - faculty, equipment and facilities. (2) A more liberal attitude toward all types of required courses, (3) changes in the attitudes of students regarding required courses in the 1960's and 70's, (4) the concern that college courses were replications of public secondary school physical education programs, and (5) the lack of scientific evidence that required physical education exerted a positive influence in the lives of people.[7] The results of the surveys that were conducted in the 60's and 70's elucidate many of the trends that have affected the general instructional programs.

An analysis of the results of the foregoing changes and how they have affected current general instruction programs seems appropriate. The fitness boom has exerted a greater influence on service programs than any event in recent years. The desire for personal fitness improvement has produced programs and courses in most departments that are designed to accommodate this increased interest. Many departments have invested in equipment and specialized faculty for fitness related programs. Testing equipment

that evaluates levels of physical fitness and exercise physiologists, or exercise technicians to operate this equipment play a prominent role in many service programs. The fitness boom that was blieved to be a fad that would soon pass seems to have attained a deserved permanence. Concepts courses are in place and seem to be meeting the needs and interests of full-time students and adults who enroll in these courses.

There has been a distinct shift from team sport orientation to an emphasis on individual courses. Included in these are the so-called high-risk or adventure courses. Backpacking, orienteering, white water canoeing, scuba, sport parachuting, and skiing are examples of high risk or adventure courses that attract students.

Grading criteria have changed with a greater emphasis placed on skill development and a lesser emphasis on such factors as dress, attendance, and attitudes. There has been an increase in the use of the pass/fail - pass/no credit, grading option. Survey data suggest that the use of this grading practice probably peaked in the 1970's. The use of competency, or proficiency, testing has more than doubles in the institutions responding to the surveys.

While graduate students have a substantial responsibility in the instruction of service classes, many full-time faculty also have teaching responsibilities in the activity classes. Many departments now offer off-campus courses in commercially operated facilities. Some examples are bowling, roller skating, equitation and golf. This has strengthened programs and added

a new dimension for students.

According to the recent study by Trimble and Hensley,[8] the most popular activity courses were:

Racquetball

Tennis/Aerobic dance

Jogging

Weight training

Snow skiing

Swimming

Skin Diving/Scuba/Volleyball

Golf/Martial Arts/Bowling

Social dance

Softball/Soccer

Badminton/Basketball

Backpacking

Cycling/Folk dance

Tumbling/Handball/Archery/Gymnastics

Water Polo

Field hockey

Rugby

It is apparent that the popularity of courses parallels the emphasis placed on lifetime sports or activities. In general, these courses are offered as electives in the curriculum. Somewhat more relaxed grading policies, i.e., pass/fail or pass/no credit options have lessened the threat of receiving a bad grade in an unfamiliar course. Students may experiment in new and different activities with less fear of a failing grade.

The broadened curricular offerings and the grading practices have probably been influential in maintaining, or even increasing, enrollments.

An additional factor that has effected participation in activity classes is the construction of newer and more modern facilities. These facilities include more space and equipment for instruction in individual sports. Opportunities have also increased for self-directed recreational activities as a result of the newer types of facilities. This situation is not enjoyed by all departments, however.

A review of the past and a look at current conditions should be followed by an examination of some of the challenges facing service programs. These are not presented in any sort of rank-order, but a significant challenge confronting many departments is that of protection of territory. Many commercial organizations are offering activities such as aerobics, dance, weight training and physical fitness programs that duplicate courses offered for academic credit by departments staffed with professionals. Some of these commercially operated programs employ people with questionable training and for reasons that are primarily related to profit making. Additionally, intramural and campus recreation departments are providing opportunities for students to participate in recreational activities that duplicate those that provide academic credit. This practice can have the effect of reducing enrollments and student credit hour production. Since most of us are, whether we like it or not, faced with the necessity of playing the numbers game, such siphoning of

prospective students represents a serious challenge to the general instruction program.

In many situations a continuing challenge we face is that of selling the administration on the value of the activity program. Because funding the program is essential and since administrative officials "hold the purse strings" we must continue to sell programs. Data that show a relationships between physical inactivity and an increased risk of the occurrence of certain diseases provide a good selling point for continuing and expanding quality service programs.

We must recognize the need for continually striving to up-grade the quality of instruction. This can be done by closer supervision and orientation of graduate assistants. Course progression with opportunities for students to participate in courses that go beyond the beginning skill level and through intermediate and advanced levels is essential.

We must pursue the developing trend of seeking innovative methods for financing service programs. One such technique that is currently being used by 17 percent of those surveyed in the 1982 study, is to charge a fee for activity courses. If the courses are of interest to students and taught by qualified and enthusiastic faculty, there is little opposition to such a practice.

Continuous monitoring of trends and student interests can be the basis for providing courses and expereinces that will attract students. The somewhat surprising and continued interest in personal physical fitness is a perfect example of a challenge

that was faced, and met with reasonable success. There will be other trends and that must be anticipated preparation made provide activities that coincide with changing student interests.

The challenge must be faced to provide for the needs of part-time older adults and the burgeoning number of students from ethnic backgrounds. Activities that are specifically designed to meet the needs of these populations are essential. Non-certified skilled persons in the community must be identified and utilized to provide instruction in activities which might not be covered by c certified full-time faculty.

If we can meet these challenges successfully the results will be a stronger, more sound, and satisfying general instruction program that can change attitudes of students, colleagues and the general population. We can therefore, meet the physical needs of more students and create a more favorable appreciation of physical activity. This, after all, is why we are in this profession.

Finally, the problem of providing for those people who have the rank of instructor must be resolved. Many univeristies do not provide for tenure consideration for instructors. In many instances the general instruction program will lack continuity as a result of instructor turn-over. Provisions should be made for some type of continuing contract for competent instructors who choose to teach in the service program.

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